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### Using Magic for AIDS Prevention: Some Teaching Techniques

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## Using Magic for AIDS Prevention: Some Teaching Techniques

Ruth C. Engs

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### Abstract

*This article describes four easy "magic tricks" which can be used as "attention getters" for AIDS and STD prevention. The effect of each trick, the secret of how to make and perform it, and an educational message to go with the trick is described. These magic tricks can be used with high school students and other young adults.*

A variety of teaching techniques can be used for health education. To arouse interest in a targeted audience, "attention getters," with short educational messages, are often important. This is particularly true in HIV education where the educator might not always be in the classroom. Magic tricks generally get everyone's attention, can easily have educational messages, and can be used with most age groups. They can also be taught to peer educators and are easily carried around in a pocket.

This article describes four magic effects, namely, two condom "presentations" (the appearance of something) and two card tricks. The effects found in this article include "closeup" magic, which is shown to a few people, and "standup" magic which is shown to a small classroom size group. In case the reader wishes to expand his or her knowledge of magic, some basic texts are included in the bibliography. All the magic effects in this article have been used in my teaching. All have educational messages adapted to prevention of AIDS and other sexually

transmitted diseases (Engs, 1994). Although the effects themselves are not original with me, I have created the educational "patter" (verbal message) to go with each trick.

I realize that most of you have never done any magic, much less used it in a teaching situation. Therefore, before you start to present magic techniques, it is important to know the basic GUIDELINES and CODE OF ETHICS of presenting magic which are followed by all magicians, both amateur and professional. If you choose to use magic effects, you also need to follow the magician's code of ethics out of respect for this most ancient art.

(1) First and most importantly, after you have shown a trick, **DO NOT TELL YOUR AUDIENCE HOW IT WAS DONE OR REVEAL THE SECRET OF THE EFFECT.** The reasons are many. First of all, you will find that the secrets or "gimmicks" to most tricks are really easy or obvious once you know them. If you tell people how you did it, you ruin the effect for that person. Part of the allure and mystery of magic, for most people, is not really knowing how it is done but having fun attempting to guess the secret and delighting in the fact that the magician makes something look possible that in reality is not.

After you have shown a trick and people ask you how you did it, simply say, "magic" with a smile. If they guess how you might have done it, say, "that's a good guess," but neither confirm nor deny their guess. If you are watching a magician perform, give him or her the same respect that you would expect from a magician watching you perform a trick. This means not revealing the secret to

other observers.

When you teach a technique to colleagues or peer educators, of course, you need to reveal the secret. The process you need to follow is also the outline of how I have presented the tricks in this article. First show all the tricks. Second, teach each trick along with any preparation. Third, have everyone practice and make sure they are aware of and adhere to the magician's code of ethics.

(2) **NEVER REPEAT A TRICK FOR THE SAME AUDIENCE.** The more often a trick is repeated, the more likely the audience will figure out how it was done. Magic works by surprise, as people do not know what you are planning to do next. After you have done one trick, do a different one. For example, if you have shown the "coin into the condom trick" and someone says, "do the condom trick again for my friend," do the other condom effect. In the classroom you only need to do a trick once as an attention getter or to sum up an educational point. If you are walking around a teen hangout or a young adult bar, it is easy to go from one group to the next without repeating the tricks.

(3) **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.** Do not do the trick unless you have practiced it. The best place to practice is in front of a mirror. Next try it out on your significant other or friends.

(4) **GIVE CREDIT TO THE ORIGINATOR OF THE TRICK OR PATTERN** when teaching the technique, where possible. For example, the "coin to the condom" message is my invention but the "gypsy switch," technique is ancient and is described in *The Klutz Book of Magic*, (Kassidy & Stroud, 1990).

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For this article, the effect as the audience sees it is presented. Then I will discuss the secret of the trick and how to assemble it. Finally, I have scripted an educational message "patter" to go with the trick. Of course, the reader is encouraged to come up with his or her own educational message and devise variations for the trick.

### **Condom Out of Pamphlet Or Newspaper**

**THE EFFECT:** The magician educator shows a newspaper or an HIV prevention pamphlet on both sides. He or she rolls it into a cone, says a magic word, and pulls out a condom. He or she then rolls the condom over the end of the cone to show its use.

**THE SECRET:** Get a newspaper or a pamphlet which has several pages. Glue the bottom part of the left edge of two pages together to form a pocket. Unfold a condom out into this pocket.

When ready to present, unfold document and hold pocket closed with left fingers. Show both sides of publication. Fold publication into a cone and pull condom out of pocket. Place the condom—or a packaged one which you have on hand—over the end of the cone to demonstrate how it is put on the penis.

**THE PATTERN:** "I'm sure you have read in the newspaper"—(alternatively) "You can read in this pamphlet"—"how to reduce your risk of getting AIDS. It is important to plan ahead . . . if you are even thinking that there is a remote possibility that you might have sex, bring a condom with you. A condom is used by rolling it over the penis before intercourse. After ejaculation it is important to hold your fingers on top of the condom so that it won't slip off and spill semen which could contain the HIV virus."

### **Coin Into Condom**

**THE EFFECT:** The volunteer examines a 50 cent piece. The magician educator places it on top of a scarf or bandanna draped over his or her hand. The

magician begins to twist the scarf around the coin and then has the volunteer hold the coin within the scarf while he or she goes into his or her pocket for some magic health dust. When the dust is sprinkled over the coin the magician invites the volunteer to open the scarf. The coin has changed into a condom in a round package.

**THE SECRET:** In the right-hand pants or jacket pocket, place a round foil-covered condom and a scarf or bandana. Ask for assistance from a volunteer, and while he or she is examining a 50 cent piece, "palm" the condom (hold condom between base of thumb and base of little finger) and pull out the scarf with the right hand. Place the scarf over the hand, palm up, with the condom resting on the palm. With left fingers, place the coin on the scarf over the condom. Grab coin, and scarf with condom under it, with left first and second fingers. With right hand, begin to appear to twist the coin into the scarf. In reality let it slide into your right hand. Palm it. Have volunteer hold onto scarf over condom—which audience thinks is still the coin—while you go into your pocket and drop coin. Bring out imaginary dust and sprinkle it with your right hand over the scarf. Have the volunteer open the scarf. Then give the volunteer a condom to keep. This technique is called the "gypsy switch."

**THE PATTERN:** "If you do not have sex until you are married—(Alternately to older individuals) "If you have a long term monogamous relationship—there is little chance that you will catch AIDS or another STD. AIDS can kill you, gonorrhea and chlamydia can make you sterile, and if you get herpes you have it for life. Therefore, if you should choose to have sex, there is something for about 50 cents which you can buy which can cut the risks of these diseases . . . a condom."

**NOTES:** Since the foil covered condoms are expensive, have plenty of regular condoms to give to people. Most regular packaged condoms make noise under the scarf so cannot be used. If a brand is found which does not crackle, you can use a dollar bill folded up instead

of a coin.

### **Will the Cards Match?**

**THE EFFECT:** The magician educator has two identical piles of five cards. He asks a volunteer to tell him from which pile to pull cards while spelling out, "Will the cards match." At the end of each word, a card from each pile is laid face down on the table as a pair. After all cards have been placed on the table, all pairs are seen to match.

**THE SECRET:** Get a piece of card stock and a regular playing card. Use it to trace out a pattern for 10 cards. You may use the cards as they are or glue them to the back of regular playing cards. Hand print or duplicate the following words, one word for each card for the two sets of five cards.

<p><b>I'LL ALWAYS USE CONDOMS EVERYTIME</b></p>
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Before presenting, place the cards in the following order in deck # 1: I'LL ALWAYS USE CONDOMS EVERYTIME. For deck # 2, reverse the order so it reads: EVERYTIME CONDOMS USE ALWAYS I'LL.

To present, show both stacks and read the sentence spelled out by the cards. Place decks on table face down. Ask volunteer to tell you which pile to take the cards from as you spell out, "will the cards match." As you spell each letter for each word, put the card on the bottom of the deck. At the end of each word, after you have placed card on the bottom, take the top cards off each deck and place them face down as a pair. You continue until all the cards have been paired. Then you turn them all face up.

**THE PATTERN:** "I have two stacks of identical cards, they both say, 'I'll always use condoms everytime.' You are going to help me to spell out the words, 'will the cards match.' You tell me which deck to start with. When we come to the end of a word I'll place a card from each pile on the table . . . look they all match . . . if you are going to match up with

someone, always use a condom."

**NOTES:** Other five word messages you might want to use are "PLAN AHEAD BRING YOUR CONDOMS," "ALWAYS HAVE CONDOMS WITH YOU," "WAIT UNTIL MARRIAGE FOR SEX," or "CONDOMS LOWER RISK FOR AIDS."

### I'll Tell You Your Card

**THE EFFECT:** The magician educator lays out nine cards in a 3" x 3" arrangement. He or she asks a volunteer to select any card and tell him or her what row it is in. The magician lays the cards out again and asks what row it is now in. The magician picks up the cards and turns up the one the volunteer had picked.

**THE SECRET:** You will need a piece of card stock. Trace out nine cards using a regular playing card as a pattern. On each of the cards place one of the following words (follow the instructions for making cards from the previous trick).

**PEOPLE IN THEIR 20S  
USUALLY GOT IT  
AS TEENS**

This is a simple "matrix" card effect that I learned when I was 10 years old, to amuse a younger sister. Lay the cards down so the audience easily can read, "people in their 20s usually got it as teens." Ask volunteer to select a card and to tell you what row it is in. You know if must be one of the three cards in that row. When you pick up the cards, pick up this row last. Lay this top row down in a diagonal as you appear to place the cards on the table in a random fashion. Now ask the volunteer what row the card is in. You now know the card. Pick up the cards and place the volunteer's card on bottom. Now spell out "plan ahead," "use condom," "AIDS kills," or another nine-letter message. The last card will be the volunteer's.

**THE PATTERN:** "Did you know that people in their 20s who have AIDS generally got it as teens. I would now like you to select a card and tell me what row it's in . . . now what row . . . its always important to (spell out): P - L - A - N - A - H - E - A - D. I believe this is your card."

**NOTE:** You can use other messages on the cards. They just need to be nine

words long. Another example: "Plan ahead have lower risk sex with a condom," "Always plan ahead and bring a condom with you," or "The safest sex is to wait until you're married."

This article has presented four teaching techniques using magic. Practice them first and then have fun using them as attention getters for HIV or STD prevention education.

- Cassidy, J., & Stroud, M. (1990). *The klutz book of magic*. Palo Alto: Klutz Press.
- Engs, R. C. (1994). *Using magic for AIDS prevention: Workshop manual for AIDS prevention outreach workers*. Bloomington, IN: R. C. Engs.
- Fulves, K. (1980s). *Self working . . . magic*. New York: Dover Publishing Co. (note: this is a series of books which address many magic topics).
- McGill, O. (1984). *Science magic: 101 experiments you can do*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Tarr, B. (1977). *101 easy-to-do magic tricks*. New York: Dover Publishing Co.
- Wilson, M. (1988). *Mark Wilson's complete course in magic*. Philadelphia: Ottenheimer Publishing Co.

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